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ABSTRACT

Dealing with religious issues in the counseling process is a difficulty many therapists encounter. This paper explores a way of understanding religious ideology using Erik Erikson's concept of religious ideology as an organizer of identity. It suggests that, if religion does function as an ideology, then it would be helpful for psychotherapists to have a means of assessing the impact of the ideology. Five areas through which to assess religious ideology are provided: (1) salience of religion; (2) multigenerational transmission; (3) structural dynamics; (4) stage theories; and (5) object relations theory. It is noted that, by use of these five areas of assessment, the therapist will have a better means of understanding how the ideology functions and a better understanding of how to work therapeutically. The paper concludes by suggesting practical implications for counselors working with families and individuals who have a strong religious ideology. (Author/NB)

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THE ASSESSMENT OF SPIRITUALITY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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THE ASSESSMENT OF SPIRITUALITY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Abstract

Dealing with religious issues in the counseling process is a difficulty many therapists encounter. This paper first explores a way of understanding religious ideology utilizing Erik Erikson's concept of reigious ideology as an organizer of identity. Secondly, it suggests five ways of assessing the way the religious ideoloy functions for the individual or the family. Finally, it suggests practical implications for counselors working with families and individuals who have a strong religious ideology.

THE ASSESSMENT OF SPIRITUALITY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Introduction

Psychological theories of religion have understood religion in a variety of ways. It has been seen both as pathology in Freudian literature, and as necessary to individuation in Jungian literature. Between Freud and Jung are a variety of positions.

In an increasingly secularistic age, paradoxically, religious belief appears to be increasing. Psychotherapists regularly find themselves confronted by the religious beliefs of their clients which at times appear incongruent with the aims of psychotherapy. To maintain effectiveness, psychotherapists need some means of assessing and dealing with the religious views and values of their clients.

This paper aims at providing three things for the psychotherapist. First, it aims at providing a summary of Erikson's concept of religion as ideology. Secondly, if religion does function as an ideology, then it would be helpful for psychotherapists to have a means of assessing the impact of the ideology. This paper suggests five areas through which to assess religious ideology. Finally, by use of these areas of assessment, the therapist will have a better means of understanding how the ideology functions. As a result, he or she should have a better understanding of how to work therapeutically.

I. Religion as Ideology

Throughout the history of psychology, religion has been seen in a variety of ways. Freud, in Future of an Illusion saw religion as essentially infantile wish fulfillment. Belief in God, was seen as the desire to create a grandiose father figure who would make the world safe and secure. Freud's reductionistic view of religion, strongly influenced by the logical positivism of his day, reduces religion to neurotic infantile needs. Object relations theorists, such as Rizzuto (1979) have broadened Freud's narrow focus, and discussed the impact of early object representations on the child's perceptions of God, and begins to move away from Freud's narrow reductionism.

Jung, at one point a loyal disciple of Freud's, conceived of religion in an entirely different way. As opposed to seeing the ego as the organizing center of the personality, Jung saw the Self as that which brings integration. The self transcends ego and is connected both to the transcendent and the collective unconscious. Thus individuation, Jung's term for integration, cannot occur without spirituality being a vital dimension. Jung felt that for most of his patients over the age of 35,, religious concerns were a pressing concern. Jungian theory, drawing heavily on Eastern thought forms, sees spirituality as an essential dimension of individuation.

Transpersonal psychologists have followed Jung's lead in seeing religion as an essential dimension in the integrative process, and would posit that wholeness must incorporate the spiritual dimension.

Distinct from both Freudian theory and Jungian theory, is Erikson's concept of religion as ideology. Erikson's concept of religion as ideology begins with Erikson's definition of an ideological system, which Erikson (1968) defines as:

> ...a coherent body of shared images, ideas, and ideals which, whether based on a formulated dogma, an implicit Weltanschauug, a highly developed world image, a political creed, or indeed a scientific creed... or a "way of life", provides the participants a coherent, if systematically simplified, overall orientation in space and time, in means and ends (p. 189)

Erikson suggests identity and ideology are two aspects of the same process, and that some individuals can help resolve the identity crisis by constructing a new ideology. The ideology offers solidarity with those that share the ideological system, as well as a source of both devotion and repudiation. It provides, according to Erikson, (1958 p. 118) nutriments for the soul in the same way as the mother did for the infant. He suggests that of all the ideological systems, only religion can restore the earliest sense of appeal to a provider or providence. He suggests that the

basic task of all religion is to reaffirm that first relationship.

Thayer`s (1978) summary of Erikson's view of religion as ideology suggests that ideology offers people several specific things. Four of these are as follows: (I) a clear perspective of the future that brings hope and optimism, (2)a uniformity of appearance and shared identity, which lowers the risk of isolation. This is supported by Kiev (1974) who suggests that being part of a sect provides both a sense of exclusiveness, as well as a sense of community, which brings hope and meaning. (3) The ideology offers a sense of shared roles which can be used in a common effort. Roles are frequently spelled out clearly by the ideology. (4) Finally, religious ideology frequently brings submission to "big brothers", who "escape the ambivalence of the parent-child relationship" (Thayer, 1978 p.36) but at the same time provide strong direction.

Thus for Erikson, the concept of religion as ideology is a way of having a specific world view that has the potential of organizing life and helping with identity formation.

Whatever else religion does, it seems to serve an ideological function. In serving this ideological function, the psychotherapist will wonder if the ideology is fostering health, and will want to see how it impacts the person's overall lifestyle.

A. Religion and Health

Robert Beavers, in Psychotherapy and Growth suggests nine measures of health in family functioning. His final measure of health includes a "transcendent value system". Beavers asserts that the inevitable experiences of loss that are experienced in loss of children in the leaving home process, or the inevitable loss of spouse or parents, can only be managed with some type of transcendent value system. In Successful Marriage he states;

> Healthy marital partners also have meaning that transcends their own skin and the boundaries of their family members. It may be provided by conventional religion or by a passionate cause ..... The content seems unimportant(at least to an observer) but having a belief that directs energy and provides community with others outside the family is vital.(p. 75)

Fogarty (1976) says much the same thing. He states that one of the four dimensions of self is the depth dimension which moves towards the spiritual in a mystical search for completeness. If there is not some type of transcendent value system, this dimension of self will be frustrated and may manifest itself as fusion both in marriage and in family life.

B. Evaluation of Ideology

While many therapists would find themselves in agreement with Beavers and Fogarty, many find themselves suspicious of the religious ideologies of their clients and looking for a way of evaluating the ideology.

While one can postulate about the healthy aspects of religion and spirituality, religious ideology can also be extremely unhealthy. The recent Jim and Tammy Baker fiasco, along with Oral Roberts taking himself hostage in order to raise money, and the continued political power of Jerry Falwell, all are illustrative of the dark side of religious ideology.

II. Towards the Assessment of Religious Ideology

As the therapist is confronted by a variety of religious ideologies, having a means of assessment will be helpful. This paper suggests five categories of assessment. They include: (1) Salience of Religion, (2) Multigenerational Transmission, (3) Structural Dynamics, (4) Stage Theories, (5) Object Relations Theory.

A. Salience of Religion

The concept of salience of religion attempts to measure how important, and how much time is invested in maintaining religious ideology. This can be assessed by the therapist

with a number of questions about time spent at religious functions, and time spent in individual relgious practices such as meditation, prayer, bible study etc. It can also be partially assessed by letting the person discuss the relative importance of religion in his or her life. Generally, with a client from a strong religious ideology, the strength of the ideology will emerge quickly, and potentially be evidenced in the client's challenges of the therapists perceived religious views.

If it is apparent that little time is invested in the religious ideology, and that the ideology plays little role in identity maintainance, further assessment will be unnecessary. On the other hand, if the ideology is measured as extremely important, further assessment may be helpful.

B. Multigenerational Transmission

A second area of accessment is how the religious ideology is transmitted over generations. In this regard, a genogram that tracks religious themes may be helpful in tracking religious ideology over generations. If the therapist does a genogram in the normal intake procedure, he or she can simply ask additional questions aimed at gathering information as to how the families religious history has developed.

It may be interesting to explore whether religious ideology is transmitted smoothly over time, or whether there

have been sudden "conversion experiences", which represent a break with family tradition. It is of further interest to note whether this conversion assists in differentiation of self, or results in cut offs from the family, or whether it is a may be a way of disengaging from the family enmeshment. The impact of marriage on the families religious ideology may also be noted. While in some cases the spouse will be expected to affirm the ideology of the family, in other cases the family will be open enough to allow for diversity.

Finally, Bowen's (1977) concept of differentiation of self can be applied to religious functioning. How is differentiation of self in regard to religious ideology handled? Has the person simply accepted the families religious ideology uncritically, or has it been reworked. This issue will reemerge in the section on stage theory.

C. Structural Issues

Structural family therapy, as developed by Minuchin, has provided a very helpful way of accessing hierarchy, boundaries, executive systems, subsystems, autonomy, flexibility, and in general how families organize themselves structurally.

Religious ideology has structural implications, both for family and individual functioning. Strong religious ideology can determine family hierarchy in terms of sex role functioning, as to who has power and who is seen as "head of

the house". Ideology also impacts the role of children and how children are disciplined. It raises large parenting issues if adolescents do not own the religious values or ideology of their parents.

Religious ideology may by the central organizing "myth" of the family, in that the family organizes itself around religious activities which become the main focus of the family.

In addition to family structural issues, personality in terms of identity may be shaped by the religious ideology. Erikson points out that particularly in adolescence identity may be structured by ideology. As the ideology is seen as the center of the person, lifestyle may be shaped accordingly.

D. Stage Theory

While it is helpful to do accessment in terms of salience of religion, multigenerational transmission, structural issues, it may be helpful to access stages of religious development from a developmental model.

Both James Fowler and Scott Peck have discussed a stage model for understanding religious issues. Fowler discusses six stages of faith, while Peck discusses four.

The six stages of faith according to Fowler are as follow:

(1.) Intuitive - Projective faith. Fowler describes this as a fantasy filled stage characterized by imagination and fantasy, and is typical of the child from age 3-7. The child is greatly influenced by the modeling and religious views of parents.

(2) Mythic - Literal Faith. Children at this stage are moving into concrete operational thinking. They work at sorting out what is real from the make believe. It is a time of real literalism. The fantasy filled way of ordering the world in stage one is now curbed by the need for concreteness.

(3) Synthetic - Conventional Faith. At the synthetic-conventional level, a person's faith extends beyond the family and touches on many facets of the outside world. As a result, faith must synthesize much in terms of values and information. Stage three has its origins in adolesence, although many adults do not move beyond it. It is a conformist stage, keenly attuned to the expectations and beliefs of others in the faith community. It does not have enough individuation and identity to be sure of its own independent perspective, and relies heavily on ideology. Fowler sees the dangers of this stage as being either that the expectations of others preclude the development of autonomy, or that interpersonal betrayals can lead to religious despair.

(4) Individuative - Reflective. In stage four, the person must take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, and beliefs. Fowler suggests that this stage involves the ability to contain certain tensions such as individuality vs. group definition; self-fulfillment versus service, and relatives vs. absolutes.

While this stage can take place in young adulthood, it most frequently does not occur until into the thirties or forties. During this stage, a new identity is developing that is not simply determined by individual others. At the same time the world view is differentiated from the group. This stage reflects critically on both identity and ideology, but it tends to be overly rational with too much confidence on cognitive construction. It tends to be a stage of either or.

(5) Conjunctive Faith. Stage five moves beyond the explicit ideological system and identity construction that was worked out in stage 4. It deals with its own unconscious and with the fact that conscious ego is not the master of its own house. It wrestles with the integration of conscious and unconscious.

It accepts the fact that truth is multi-dimensional, and accepts the fact that its own tradition represents partial truth, limited by a particular people's experience

of God. At the same time, this des not imply a lack of commitment to one's own faith tradition. Fowler (1977) cites philosopher of religion, Paul Ricoeur's concept of a second naivete in which symbols have renewed meaning as illustrative of this stage. That is, in contrast to a first naivete in which religious ideology is accepted uncritically, a second naivete occurs after the person has wrestled with the complexities of the world as it as, and finds renewed meanings and symbols. It attempts to think dialectically, and is therefore open to paradox and contradiction.

(6) Universalizing Faith. Stage six for Fowler is a rare one. It is characterized by people who have moved through stage five's paradoxes through the actualization of radical lifestyles. These individuals challenge concepts of normalcy in terms of their lack of concern with self preservation and cultural norms of attachment and seem motivated by notions of universal good. He illustrates this stage with people like mother Theresa, Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Gandi.

<u>Fowler and Peck</u> Fowler, borrowing heavily from Piaget, Kolberg, and Erikson, has developed a helpful developmental schema for understanding spiritual development and for the accessment of spirituality.

Others have borrowed and adapted his theory. Scott Peck, in his new book, Different Drummer" describes four stages. These four stages are (1) chaotic, antisocial, (2) formal, institutional, (3) skeptic, individual, (4) mystic, and communal.

Stage one is the stage of underdeveloped spirituality where Peck feels most children and some adults fit. He refers to adults in this stage as being incapable of loving and functioning without principles, and with a lack of integrity.

Stage two includes those who have had sudden conversions, as well as those who are attached to forms and conventional religion, similiar to Fowler's stage of synthetic - conventional.

Stage three includes those who become skeptical of form, tradition and "pre-packaged religion". They become quite individualistic and are frequently involved in social causes. They are seekers of truth. Peck feels that if they seek diligently, they will arrive at stage four.

Whether one uses Fowler's schema, or that of Peck, or some combination thereof is not all that important. What does seem important is having some way of accessing where one is in terms of spiritual development utilizing the dynamics of stage theory.

E. Object Relations Theory

Object relations theory departs from the Freudian model that God images grow only out of the helplessness of infancy and childhood, where the child longs for the security of grandiose father to make the world safe. Mother plays little role in the Freudian theory of religion.

Object relations theory, in contrast, postulates that childhood object relations have been unknowingly transformed into a God image. Rizzuto, in her classic study, (1979) suggests that the components of God representatiomns come from varied sources.

Rizzuto sees God as a "special type of object representation created by the child in the psychic space where transitional objects - whether toys, blankets, or mental representations are provided with their powerfully real illlusory lives" (p. 177). This transitional object can be used in moving from symbiosis to individuation.

Rizzuto holds that most persons have a personal representation of God which can be utilized for belief or unbelief. Family helps in the creation of the childs view of God. Initially this representation of God is based on the experience and memory of the primary caring person. Underwood (1986) underscores the fact that the God representation is a composite of representations of parental figures, and that many people never modify that God image.

Difficulties in belief and unbelief, then, have their origins in difficulties with early object representations.

That is if basic trust issues are existent with parents they will also be projected onto God. God will remain distant and untrustworthy. If parents were demanding, and had high expectations, God will also be seen as impossible to please. On the other hand some will project onto God their idealized parental images.

Thus, this level of assessment focuses on understanding how early object representations helped inform the person's view of God.

III. Implications for Counseling and Psychotherapy

Moving through the five part assessment outlined above leads to some obvious implications for counselors and psychotherapists.

First, being able to access the role of religious ideology in a client or family in terms of salience of religion, multigenerational transmission, structural theory, stage theory, and object relations theory, provides a wealth of information. If the role of religious ideology is not acknowledged, joining with the client or family will be impossible because the religious ideology will shut out the therapist. On the other hand, elliciting information about the families religious ideology will enable the therapist to join quickly.

Secondly, religious ideology means that "God" is a member of the family. To ignore the presence of this family

member is to invite therapeutic disaster. Understanding the ideology of the family, and in particular being able to understand the object relations material will enable to the therapist to understand what type of family member "God" is. Griffin points out the families in which "God " is a family member is similiar to a family with an esteemed older member, who is revered by each family member and who grants audience to each family member separately. (1986, p 608) This family member must be part of the therapeutic process.

Thirdly, to work most effectively with a family or individual who has a strong religious ideology, which determines family structure, and who may be at a synthetic - conventional level of stage functioning, means that the therapist must be able to work within the language system of the ideology or else refer to someone who is capable of doing that. To attempt to work outside of this language system will result in increasing reistance, since closed systems tend to screen "foreign information".

Fourthly, to work with the religious ideology effectively its truth or falsity must not be dealt with by the therapist. It must be seen only as a construction of reality or as a "way of seeing" and worked with accordingly. Watzlawick's (1984) reviews of constructivist philosophy are helpful in this regard. The therapist strives for religious neutrality, shows reverence for the client's religious ideology, and consistently focuses on the way the religious

ideology impacts the family as opposed to arguing the truth or falsity of it. Obviously, as Lovinger (1984) has pointed out the therapist can only do this if he or she has dealt with his or her own religious issues.

Fifthly, through accessment of religious ideology, good joining skills, the client may be helped to grow in his or her religious ideology. Remembering that religious ideology can contribute to health and meaning in life, by helping the client make connections through object relations, and through multigenerational connections, the client may be helped to modify his or her image of God, grow beyond their present stage, and experience grace in the therapeutic relationship.

Finally, assessing the role of religious ideology and examining it in terms of salience of religion, multigenerational transmission, structural dynamics, stage theory, and object relations theory will give the therapist a great deal of information. This information can be used to join with the faimly and can allow the therapist to gain greater leverage within the family. However, to be wholistic, therapy must also struggle with helping clients find meaning and therefore religious growth goals may be among the goals of treatment.

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